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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines, from a teacher's perspective, 10 factors that contribute to the success of a field trip. Trip facilitation and content are addressed in the following guidelines: (1) addressing the concerns of all stakeholders in a politically astute manner can eliminate barriers to a successful trip; (2) reconnaissance trips can improve knowledge of the site and facilitate the trip in terms of both logistical and curricular considerations; (3) field trips must be linked to curriculum; (4) field trips must fall somewhere between focusing activities and reflective activities, and the timing of trips is dependent on the particular course of study and on the previous experiences and abilities of the class; (5) field trips must be accessible to all students, regardless of their physical, intellectual, or financial profile; (6) field trips are successful if students are actively engaged, both mentally and physically, at the site; (7) the closer to reality an experience is, the greater the benefit derived; (8) incidental learning can be rewarding and is often an unexpected bonus, but safety must be the first priority when the unexpected occurs; (9) the human resources available at a field trip site can contribute greatly to the success of a trip, and it is worthwhile to cultivate a good rapport with these individuals; and (10) oral and written stories, fictional or nonfictional, contribute meaning to the experience and increase student engagement. Contains 20 references. (TD)

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Chapter 9

FIELD TRIPS: MAXIMIZING THE EXPERIENCE

Deborah A. Millan

Deb Millan was educated at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, where she earned BA, BEd, and MEd degrees. She has taught elementary grades and specialized in the fine art of organizing field trips. Deb helped design the school tours offered by the Vanden Hoek Farm, Wolfe Island, Ontario. The farm program includes tone-setting in an old, rural, one-room school, hands-on work with agricultural problems at activity stations, storytelling and conversations with old-timers, and classroom follow-up.

Deb's chapter is an account of what she learned from her experiences in leading field trips as part of the regular curriculum. The value of the chapter lies in the highly practical distillation of that experience being made available for others. The chapter is also important because Deb enthusiastically shows that out-of-school work is accessible and worthwhile for every classroom teacher.

Introduction

During my teaching career I've led field trips for students from grades Kindergarten through Grade 8. The children have come from urban, rural, and inner-city schools, and class profiles have included a full range of economic status and academic ability. I have led day trips involving as many as 150 intermediate students, and overnight excursions of up to four days' duration involving 30 students. Regardless of my grade assignment or the environment in which I found myself teaching, field trips have been an integral part of the program I deliver because I believe that field trips are a valuable vehicle through which classroom studies can become meaningful to students, regardless of their academic abilities.

Studies have shown that field-based instruction positively affects the understanding and retention of knowledge of concepts presented (Lisowski & Disinger, 1991; Moles, 1988). Field trips can be motivational for the seemingly disinterested learner. They permit the classroom teacher a new environment in which to observe his or her charges. O'Toole (1981) refers to the "opening up" phenomenon exhibited by students who scarcely speak in class, yet become positively animated learners while on field trips. Learning should be fun, and field trips can add both excitement and an element of fun to a program in a novel way. Pinero (1985) indicates that planned field trips can be both fun and instructional. The value of field trips as an instructional strategy is both broad and legitimate.

What makes a good field trip? Certainly all those involved in the education of students, except perhaps the students themselves, expect a field trip to be educationally significant and suitable (DuVall & Krepel, 1975). The focus for each stakeholder is likely to be slightly different. From the perspective of someone in a supervisory officer's role, a good field trip may be one that meets the school district's policies (Zirkel & Gluckman, 1983). From the principal's perspective, a field trip may be considered successful if it doesn't disrupt the regular programming in his or her school, or put stress on staff not participating in the field trip. If the field trip is free of accidents and disruptive behaviour, and promotes good public relations in the community, it is likely to be viewed in a positive

light. From the students' perspective, a good field trip might be one on which they are able to see and do something new, spend time with their friends, eat, and spend money. Parents and guardians may be concerned about the cost, duration, distance from home, and safety.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the factors which contribute to the success of a field trip, from the perspective of a classroom teacher. Under the umbrella of policy guidelines, classroom teachers maintain a wide degree of latitude with which they may influence both the organization and content of a field trip. The method here will be to examine the literature and to reflect on personal experience in an effort to illuminate factors, beyond those that typically make up field trip policies, that enable some field study situations to be more successful than others. This chapter does not offer a step-by-step guide to planning field trips. Instead, it presents a palette of ideas and experiences, concluding with a list of guiding principles. Two sets of factors are considered: one set relates to the facilitation of the trip, and the other set addresses the actual content of the trip. Facilitation of the trip refers to all the things the teacher, or trip leader, can do in advance to ensure a successful excursion. The content aspect focuses on what the students actually do while they are involved in the out-of-classroom learning experience.

Facilitating Field Trips

There are five considerations in facilitating field trips: local politics, logistics, linkage to the curriculum, timing, and accessibility. Of these five considerations, four are readily recognized and discussed in the literature. The exception is local politics.

The Political Element of Field Trips

By organizing a field trip, the teacher initiates connections among the school, the parents, and the community being visited. When dealing with people, some thoughtful anticipation of their responses can eliminate difficulties. In this chapter, the politics of

field trips refers to how to approach and engage the cooperation of the people affected by the trip being planned.

Unlike normal classroom work, teachers on field trips are open to public observation and comment. This is not a bad thing if the trip is well planned and educationally suitable, and the students are behaving in socially acceptable ways. The political preparation for a field trip can do much to alleviate potential public relations difficulties, and it begins with a teacher's greatest ally, the principal.

It is critical that the field trip leader has the support of his or her administration. Although the principal has to give approval for the trip, it is worthwhile to do more than secure the minimum approval needed. For example, most principals will be glad to read an outline of the planned activities and discuss the trip informally. By making sure the principal knows the plan details, and appreciates the connection between the trip and classroom work, potential difficulties, such as a telephone call from a concerned parent, can be dealt with knowledgeably.

The permission slip that goes home to parents must state more than the date, time, and cost of the field trip. It must provide the parents with a brief description of the plan, show them how the trip supports what is being studied in the classroom, and, if at all possible, invite their participation. This note must be sent out well in advance (three weeks minimum) and include the school telephone number. In this way, parents are able make their own plans and provide feedback. For field trips involving an overnight stay, or some sort of risk, an informational parent's meeting is warranted. (For a fuller treatment of parental involvement, see Chapter 5 by Bill Patterson and Bert Horwood.)

Unfortunately, there may be students in the class whose behaviour is a concern. When determining a child's participation on a field trip, two philosophies emerge. One extreme is to picture field trips as a privilege, or a reward for good behaviour. In this case, a student's right to attend a field trip is linked to his or her behaviour. If the individual is disruptive in class, he or she does not go on the trip. David Hawke (1991) supports this picture: "If students haven't earned the privilege of an outing, then leave them behind. It can be done, it has been done, and the rest of the class benefits because of it" (p.17).

The other way is to picture field trips as a central feature of education to which each student is entitled as much as to classroom instruction. In this case, every effort must be made to ensure that all students have the field trip experience. However, this does not mean that the trip leader should throw away all standards for appropriate behaviour and safety, and never leave a student at school while the rest of the class goes away. Communicating expectations clearly to students, parents, and administrators is essential. These standards must be reasonable and, in some cases, reflect the special needs of individual students. For example, one student may not function well in a group format. Inviting the parent, or other suitable adult, for the specific purpose of working with that student is one way to ensure that even the most difficult student has the field trip experience. If field trips are seen as an obligation for the student rather than a privilege, then the teacher takes on a special program and supervisory burden which must involve the entire class and may require additional adults to accompany the trip. After addressing those needs, if a child's attendance still poses a safety threat, the child should not be permitted on the trip. Detailed arrangements for the child's programming and supervision at school must then be made. None of that should prejudice the child's participation in future out-of-school work.

In larger schools where there are several classes in each grade, an added consideration when initiating field trips is the reaction of teachers of the same grade. If one teacher's class goes on more field trips than others, students are usually quick to complain of unfairness. Parents may question the discrepancy as well. Planning meetings of teachers in the same grade cluster allow teachers to let others know of their field trip plans. By exchanging field trip intentions, colleagues are forewarned and have the opportunity to respond appropriately.

When teachers share similar approaches to teaching and plan objectives together, shared field trips can be rewarding because dialogue among colleagues tends to enhance the program. On the other hand, a teacher may try to join trips organized by others without having common goals. In some cases, their involvement in the trip will not have a great effect on the ability of other classes to have a successful outing. For example, trips to view a performance may be

taken by several classes at once because viewing is the primary task of the students, and large numbers can be seated at one time. I organized a trip to a large city for 135 students to see a famous musical. Each teacher was responsible for preparing his or her students and there was no collaboration among teachers regarding such preparation. The students, parents, and teachers were happy and felt that the experience had been a rewarding one.

Trips that require readiness and are action-based are not suited to last-minute, tag-along students or teachers. Their attendance tends to be disruptive to the success of the field trip. Hawke (1991) refers to these students as bus fillers who have no idea why they are there, where they are, or what to expect. It is unwise to make a trip less expensive by filling a bus. Those extra, unprepared people are a safety risk and could ruin the hard work students have done in preparing for the experience. Successful trips are led by teachers who have a genuine interest and some expertise in the destination. Teachers who tag along are less likely to inspire or prepare their students, and if that work is done by the organizing teacher, the critical classroom connection will be lost.

Some of these political considerations can be put into context by examining two excursions that helped me learn how to work with people in field trip planning.

I was placed in a school late in September and told by my principal that I was responsible for taking thirty-five Grade 8 students on an overnight camping excursion in two weeks' time. My better judgment told me that I didn't have time to adequately prepare the students, let alone build the type of rapport needed to work with this age group. The overnight camping trip was a tradition at the school, and I was expected to carry it on.

Having a modest amount of experience in the outdoors, I immediately began pre-trip lessons, including supplying the students with a list of easily obtained gear. I requested that no personal tape players or battery-operated items be brought along so that we could enjoy the outdoor setting without distraction. I also presented the students with suggested menu plans for the meal they were to prepare. To my amazement, the students, who had more tenure in the school than I did, raced to the principal's office, complaining of my unfair treatment and my plans to ruin their excursion. The other two

Grade 8 classes had already had their overnight trip, and hadn't faced any of the guidelines that I had put to my new class. I stubbornly persisted and told the students that I would check their packs if necessary to ensure that junk food and radios were not brought along. This time, it was the parents of the students who protested to the principal's office my unreasonable restrictions and intent to invade the privacy of their offspring.

My principal of two weeks backed me all the way in front of parents and students alike, and privately suggested that I not search any packs.

Despite feeling uncomfortable with the preparations and the tone of the class, the trip proceeded. My objectives for that field trip—introducing the students to low-impact camping, menu-planning, and heightening the use of their senses while in the outdoors—were not realized. The students' objective of partying until they were too tired to move was heartily met. The trip also had a great effect in strengthening class unity!

Had I been a little more politically astute, the trip could have been more successful and the objectives I set could have been reached. I was fortunate that the principal gave me the support that I needed. Communication to establish shared values among teaching staff, administration, parents, and children is extremely important.

I didn't recognize that the students had previously been given a major stake in the nature of the field trip. While it is the responsibility of the teacher to determine the trip's objectives, input from the students can give them a sense of ownership and contribute to the success of the trip. Chandler (1989) noted, "Teachers should decide the purposes and benefits of specific field trips, of course, but students should have some say about them too. That way, classroom assignments can be designed to help students concentrate on the intended benefits and to think about what they should watch for on the outing" (p. 30). The objectives for a field trip must match the needs of the class.

Although this particular field trip had already been initiated before I arrived, a second letter from me to the parents, outlining an overview of the event and describing how the guidelines I established would help promote what was happening in the classroom, would have gone a long way to eliminate the difficulties that arose.

That same year, the school's traditional, end-of-year field trip to Montreal was prepared by the other two Grade 8 teachers. After the September fiasco, and having little influence with fellow staff members, I followed the path of least resistance during the one brief planning session that took place. The one-day outing was to include unsupervised shopping in downtown Montreal, a hike up the three hundred or so steps of Mt. Royal, a stop at St. Joseph's Oratory, a walking tour of Old Montreal and several more churches, an unsupervised supper, a subway ride, and, finally, a Montreal Expos baseball game.

The day of the field trip was extremely hot and humid. The hike up the steps of Mt. Royal was debilitating and, in some cases, humiliating for students who were overweight or who suffered from asthma. Parent supervisors had difficulty with this task, and fit students raced ahead, unsupervised. Aside from the remote possibility of flagging down a passing taxi, there was no alternative but to climb the mountain. Our students held a variety of religious beliefs, and three Catholic churches were featured on the trip for no apparent reason. Essentially, the day's "educational" activities provided an excuse for being in Montreal to watch a ball game. These types of trips no longer gain approval from most administrators.

Both the camping trip and the Montreal experience have influenced my approach to dealing with staff members when considering field trips. Hawke (1991) notes that there are some real problems aligning the attitudes of students, teachers, principals, and site staff. I agree. Because of my experiences with field trips, I do not usually participate in excursions that I haven't organized. By being the organizer, I can control the learning outcomes, the choice of location, the activities planned, and the standard of student behaviour. Without control over these factors, the success of a field trip is in jeopardy.

When planning field trips, I try to think about the people who are going to be affected. By putting myself in their shoes, and by thinking of potential concerns before they arise, I can gain the much-needed support for my endeavours. For me, this has been an effective way to deal with the politics of field trips.

The Pre-Trip Visit

The second major consideration when acting as a facilitator for a field trip is whether to visit the destination prior to the excursion. If a teacher is taking students to a new site for the first time, a pre-trip visit is advisable for two reasons. First, the pre-trip visit will allow the leader to examine and explore the facilities and make any logistical adjustments. Secondly, the pre-trip visit allows the trip leader to assess more accurately the educational potential of the site.

Gemake (1980) says that the pre-trip visit is a way to broaden the experience of the students. To prepare the students for the trip, the teacher must have a comprehensive understanding of what the site has to offer. Chandler (1985) suggests that "every proposed field trip should be screened in advance by sending an appropriate teacher on the trip without the students to determine its suitability and value" (p. 30). Hawke (1991) also values a pre-trip visit. He cites this as a time to meet with site staff and make arrangements for students with special needs, such as wheelchair access.

On the Montreal trip, I was unfamiliar with the setting and had had no opportunity to visit the site prior to the trip. I was particularly concerned about the subway. Imagine 150 students, who have never before been on mass transit, individually buying tickets in a second language, making change, and trying to stay with their group leader in order that the entire group could board the train together! Did I fail to mention that a transfer was also required? Of course, it was pandemonium! Indeed, the situation was dangerous as several students lacked the proper respect for the warning lines painted on the floor of the subway station. The facts that group tickets could be purchased and that certain stations at peak hours were extremely crowded, were small bits of information that could have been learned in advance.

There are times when pre-trip visits are not essential. A pre-trip to a theatrical performance is not really necessary because the trip leader can question the performing box office personnel as to the suitability of a program, or rely on reviews, long in advance of booking tickets. Information packages that accompany promotional material for a variety of sites can range from mediocre to outstanding. A telephone conversation with the appropriate site staff can

supplement the literature and take the place of a pre-trip visit. This is especially worthwhile if the site is some distance away.

A useful source of good information is other teachers. If a pre-trip visit is not possible, a colleague who has already taken a class to the site may be able to provide useful information. Teachers' individual interests and areas of expertise often affect the success of their field trips. Some level of expertise is required. Caras (1977) suggests that "one of the most common mistakes educators make is to underestimate the amount of expertise required in the field" (p. 50). There is also a difference between having a skill or high level of expertise and being able to share it with a class of students. For example, a highly skilled paddler may not necessarily be skilled in teaching others or leading canoe trips.

Linking the Field Trip to the Curriculum

Connecting field trips to the curriculum is emphasized in the literature. Brehm (1969) identifies this connection as an overriding value. Chandler (1985) concludes that elementary school teachers see field trips as an integral part of their curriculum. Gemake's (1975) first step in preparing for a field trip is to "survey the curriculum guidelines and decide upon the concepts which can be best developed through a field trip. Choose a field trip which will provide activities of direct observation to supplement classroom learning" (p. 24).

A field trip that does not have a legitimate link to the curriculum is hard to justify educationally. In the past, going to large cities to watch a baseball game or to attend a theme park could be the sole purpose of a field trip. As these trips became harder to justify and the flow of students stopped, some major entertainment centres began promoting "educational" programs, such as science days and backstage tours. Apparently these sites realized that, without some claim to academic merit, approval for student trips to their site would be reduced.

When planning a field trip, make certain it is really worth taking. Trips don't have to be expensive or far from home to be successful. Indeed, Falk and Balling (1982) concluded that teachers should strive to take students on outings that provide a varying amount of

novelty, depending on the age and experience of the students. New settings and the task of getting there sometimes overwhelms students, and the desired learning outcomes are not met because there is simply too much for the students to take in. A familiar site within the community may be a reasonable and effective alternate.

Whether a field trip is within the community or goes beyond it, is expensive or inexpensive, is a one-day venture or one of several days, it must have direct value and importance to the curriculum.

Timing the Field Trip

The fourth aspect to consider when organizing a field trip is its actual timing in relation to the curriculum. Should the trip be at the beginning, middle, or end of a particular unit of study?

Some argue that field trips should be the starting point for a unit of study (Sesow & McGowan, 1984); others call for them at the end of the unit. Sesow and McGowan largely base their claim, that field trips should be initiated as the beginning of a unit of study, on Jean Piaget's observations on cognitive development that "seem to support a progression from concrete activities to more abstract experiences for students" (p. 69). Experiential learning theory also suggests that firsthand experience must come early in the learning process.

Olcott (1987) differs in his approach and arms his students with knowledge prior to the excursion so that, when they are on the trip, they may attain a high level of thinking, such as problem solving. He notes that many features of a site, such as guides and displays, are under-used if students are unprepared.

To be successful, the timing of the field trip lies on a time line somewhere between pre-trip and post-trip learning. A field trip is somewhat like a book: it requires an introduction and purpose, and would seem pointless if it didn't have an appropriate conclusion. Both Gemake (1980) and Olcott (1987) stress the idea of building background and pre-teaching before visiting a site. Berliner and Pinero (1985) conclude that "failure to require classroom follow-up devalues the trip's instructional purpose" (p. 15). No doubt it is in the classroom, following the trip, that experiences can be relived and examined, ideas and observations shared, and unanswered

questions researched. The timing of the field trip also depends on the objectives that the teacher hopes to achieve, and on the ability and experience of the students. Whether early or late in an instructional sequence, teachers and students should exploit the particular advantages of that sequence.

Field Trip Accessibility

Three types of accessibility must be considered: intellectual, physical, and financial. It is the teacher's responsibility to meet the needs of all students, providing individualized programming if necessary, whether inside or outside the classroom. When contacting the field trip site, it is essential to find out what the students will be expected to do and, if necessary, to inform the site staff of any special needs students have.

The whole idea behind a field trip is to get out into the world and move away from abstract configurations. O'Toole (1981) refers to students with learning disabilities, or other physical and emotional handicaps, "opening up" as readily as the average student in response to their experiences at Colonial Williamsburg. "Because the museum experience is such a direct physical experience, one that has *things* rather than *words* at its core, it is equally accessible to every class member who has been mainstreamed. It works powerfully and well for everyone" (p. 64).

Physical accessibility for all students is essential. Every member of the class is valuable and has the right to participate in the activities of the class. Field trips are no exception. There is no doubt that students with physical challenges require additional attention so that they can participate as fully as they are able in all school activities. Parents and guardians of these individuals are a great source of information and support. A classroom teacher should not be hesitant in conferring with them when concerns regarding field trips arise.

Whether written or unwritten, many schools have a policy that no student should miss a field trip because he or she cannot afford it (Zakariya, 1985). The teacher's knowledge of students' finances is often relied on to identify individuals who require financial assistance. Unfortunately, relying on such knowledge for supporting

these students does not guarantee that those in need receive help. Teachers, although perhaps having the best opportunity to judge the situation, sometimes lack a thorough understanding of the financial situation in the student's home. Pride, and the fear of ridicule by peers, can also cause a needy student to turn down a private offer of assistance.

One alternative to addressing this problem is a plan that includes all students in fund raising in order to offset the cost of the trip. A second strategy is to ensure that all students and parents are informed of the nature of the trip, and its cost, well in advance of the trip date. Having this information allows parents and students the opportunity to plan for the costs involved.

Sometimes, for no apparent reason, a student decides not to attend a field trip. On the surface, it appears that the student has simply decided not to go. It takes time to find out the real reason; perhaps he or she feels uncomfortable or uncertain about the proposed activities. Often, talking to the student, answering his or her questions, and providing reassurance, is all that is needed to secure the individual's participation in the field trip. Occasionally, a conversation with a child's parent solves the mystery. Sometimes athletic or cultural factors are at work, and program adjustments will make inclusion possible. For example, some cultures require young, unmarried women to have continual adult supervision. Providing this to the parents' satisfaction makes attendance possible.

The Content Component of Field Trips

How the student's time is occupied while on the field trip is critical to its success. All the background learning and pre-teaching that occurs in the classroom before the class sets foot outside the door can be wasted if a connection between what the students know, what they hope to learn, and what they are about to do, isn't made in a fashion that is meaningful to them. Four factors that enhance this meaning on a field trip are active learning in real-life settings, incidental learning, the human factor, and the use of stories.

Active Learning in Real-Life Settings

There is great support for activity-based learning situations. Field trips that engage the students both mentally and physically are likely to be more successful than ones where guides or teachers perform for passive students (Berliner, 1985.). Active participation in a novel setting was found by MacKenzie and White (1982) to lead to new learning, to reinforce what had already been learned in school, and to aid greatly in the retention of information.

It is important to treat the actual activity the students are involved in while on the trip as just one aspect of learning. The field trip represents the "challenging action" stage in Joplin's (1985) model of experiential education. The challenging action is preceded by preparation ("focus") and followed by some form of reflection ("debrief"), all the while nurtured by support and feedback. Reflecting on the significance of field trip events is essential to enable the student to internalize new meaning.

In my own experience, I have found field trips most successful when students are able to actively participate at the site. On a visit to an archaeological dig, my Grade 7 students grew restless as the guide relied heavily on a static display to present historical detail. Their level of attentiveness and questioning blossomed when they were given tools, participated in the dig, and eventually cleaned and catalogued actual artifacts.

Gibbons and Hopkins (1985) present a scale of experientiality that enables educators to judge the experiential quality of a given program. "The degree of experience increases as the participant becomes more responsible for the experience that occurs, and more responsible for mastering the activity involved to the fullest extent possible" (p. 98). Gibbons and Hopkins illustrate their point by comparing a field trip to a farm, to the sustained challenge faced by a 4-H Club member who plants, cultivates, and markets crops. It is apparent that the more experiential the activity, that is, the closer it is to reality, the more significant and lasting the activity's effect is on the individual. This was the case in the archaeology experience of my class.

Although what the students did at the site wasn't exactly the way in which an archaeologist would have conducted his or her work, it

was a close approximation. It could be called an on-site simulation. The artifacts and tools were real, but for safety reasons and a lack of expertise on the part of the students, caustic chemicals and sophisticated computer programs were not used in the cleaning and recording of the artifacts.

O'Toole (1981) describes a simulated archaeological dig at Colonial Williamsburg and identifies two areas of learning that can be facilitated through such activity, skills, and values. "Participation in such an inquiry can both teach and allow the application of a range of cognitive skill every social studies teacher aspires to develop in his or her student from classification, and measurement, to dating historical reconstruction and interpretation" (p. 64). He continues, "Comprehension of the value of another culture as well as a growing appreciation of the importance of preserving old things and, perhaps, commitment to further study can also flow from experience with objects and object analysis" (p. 64). I observed these characteristics in my students as well.

Incidental Learning and Dealing with the Unexpected

Joplin (1985) claims that all learning is experiential. She states that "not all of it [learning] is deliberately planned or takes place through an educational institution or setting" (p. 117). The awareness of incidental learning is valuable for a teacher with limited tripping experience in order to be open to the possibility and potential of this characteristic of field trips. It is a characteristic that is sometimes beyond the control of the teacher.

Opportunities arise spontaneously, and the trip leader must be able to adapt readily to the situation and recognize the value of the moment. Chandler (1985) observes "the unexpected is the spawning ground for creativity" (p. 30) and supports the idea of capturing an unexpected opportunity and integrating it into the field trip plans. Gemake (1980) is more regimented and advises the trip leader to "stick to the purpose of the trip" (p. 25).

On a trip involving a ferry crossing, I permitted the students to get off the bus once it was safe to do so. I asked them to observe the shoreline as we departed the dock. The ferry ride was a novel aspect of the trip and I anticipated that they would explore the vessel.

What I didn't count on was that they would request permission from the captain to have a look around the wheelhouse. Before I knew it, all 34 students were lined up, waiting their turn to enter the wheelhouse with three or four of their classmates. They had a great view of the shoreline and a chance to chat with crew members. For some students, this unplanned learning opportunity was the highlight of the excursion.

Incidental learning is sometimes obvious as in the example above, but more often it is subtle, occurring on an individual basis. The work a student does after returning from a trip often reveals some insight into experiences that had unplanned influence.

The Human Factor

A trip that involves resource people at the site has a human factor that can influence the content of a field trip. This human factor is largely out of the control of the trip leader except through experience with the site and return visits. If you take a trip and are fortunate to have a guide who handles children well and is knowledgeable and personable, make a note to request that person for future visits. If possible, build a rapport with site staff prior to your visit.

I once took a class of Grades 3 and 4 students to a military historical site. One of the students had an uncle who was working there as a costumed guide. I invited the uncle to come into the school to meet the students prior to our visit, and he did so—not in uniform, but in his ordinary dress. He told the class about his job, his training, and his costume.

When we arrived for our tour, the children were full of anticipation as they tried to pick out which costumed guide was Trevor's uncle. Throughout the day, the students followed their guide about, eagerly asking questions. They had a clear understanding that his military manner with fellow interpreters was part of his performance, and that the person they had met in the classroom and were comfortable with, was still there to guide them. They felt very much at ease with him.

These children had made a connection with an individual who enabled them to become engaged in the environment they were

experiencing. Because they had met their guide in a setting familiar to them—their own classroom—they were to some extent more prepared to interact with him in a new setting. Having a guide who was familiar to them helped them get beyond the "novel field trip effect" that Falk and Balling (1982) refer to. Their ability to assimilate much of what they had experienced was revealed in the art work they completed in the days following the trip.

The Role of Stories

Another side of the human factor on field trips is that of story. Most sites have associated with them characters either living or dead, fictional or nonfictional. I have observed that children appear to digest, internalize, and make sense of a site more readily through a story than through other methods. When students participate in the human element of a site in a storytelling situation, or from literature, the site becomes more real to them. As Leonard (1990) indicates, "A good story, well told, is an experience that opens us to new perception, emotion and behaviour" (p. 12). She further suggests that listeners may "develop knowledge and moral character" (p. 12) from listening to a story. Stories can add meaning to experience.

Olcott (1987) identifies the use of the written word, that of both the historian and novelist, and primary sources of historical evidence, as being valuable tools in enhancing the success of an excursion. He describes a field trip to Gettysburg where the students discover a site described in a popular Civil War novel and read the passage while standing in the exact spot where the characters were located. He tells us that "one class upon reading the selection became so excited that they spontaneously let out a cheer and chased imaginary Rebels down Little Round Top all the way to Devil's Den" (Olcott, 1987, p. 492). Further, he used a collection of old photographs and had the students duplicate poses from original scenes. These types of activities enable the students to gain deeper insight and engagement.

I have had similar positive experiences using the written word as a catalyst for learning when on field trips. I took a class of Grades 5 and 6 students to visit a restored heritage house. The pre-trip literature noted that a children's novel was set in that house. I read the

novel to my students; when we arrived at the house, they were full of comments before we even entered through the front door. "This is what I thought it would look like!" "Do they have any of her things?" "Can we find the window she looked out?" "Hey! There aren't any willow trees!" "Is this open on weekends?" Their questions and comments were ably dealt with by the costumed interpretive staff who were impressed with the level of the students' enthusiasm and obvious appreciation of the site. Finally, when it was time to board the bus, I noted that several of my more "difficult-to-motivate" students were nowhere to be seen; a quick search found them at the rear of the house, arguing over how the novel pertained to the actual site.

In this case, the students were able to make a link with the site they were visiting because of a story we had shared prior to the outing. Visiting the site motivated them because they had characters and a plot in mind. Prior to the trip, they formed an idea of what they thought the site would be like. They went on the trip looking for things that were relevant to them and were quick to point out any discrepancies they observed. They were able to develop an appreciation for the author's license to write a fictional story that had an actual setting.

The ability of stories to contribute to the success of a field trip is supported both by personal observation and by the literature. Why they influence the success of the field trip is less clear. Perhaps a story, well told, meets individuals at their own intellectual levels. Students can relate to characters in stories because they can use their own lives as a basis for comparison. Knowledge needed to gain an appreciation of a site is easier to comprehend if it is woven into the context of a story. Costumed interpretive staff and living storytellers are found at many historic sites as testimony to the effectiveness of the use of characterization to enable students of all ages to gain a better understanding of the site they are visiting. I have found that stories contribute to the success of a field trip and, when planning for a trip, I take the time and make the effort to seek them out.

Conclusion

There is obviously overlap between facilitation components and content components when examining the make-up of a successful field trip. How can one discuss the logistical aspects of a field trip without considering the stakeholder? How can one plan the activities of a field trip without considering the resources available? Furthermore, individual teachers will bring their own experiences, interests, and teaching styles to the table when planning a field trip. Therefore, the ideas presented here are meant to be starting blocks for a solid foundation rather than a recipe to be followed to the letter. Heath's (1985) comment applies:

> I am dismayed by teachers who ask me how I teach, believing that my specific teaching methods will necessarily help them. We do not empower others by offering them our techniques; we empower them by helping them internalize principles of broad generality that provide guidelines to them for creating their own techniques. (p. 111)

What follows is a summary of broad guidelines developed in this chapter.

1. When initiating field trips, addressing the concerns of all those affected in a politically astute manner can eliminate barriers to a successful trip.
2. Reconnaissance trips can improve knowledge of the site and thus facilitate the trip in terms of both logistical and curriculum considerations.
3. Field trips must be linked to curriculum.
4. Field trips must fall somewhere between focusing activities and reflective activities. The timing of trips is dependent on the particular course of study and on the previous experiences and ability of the class.
5. Field trips must be accessible to all students, regardless of their physical, intellectual, or financial profile.
6. Field trips are successful if students are actively engaged, both mentally and physically, at the site.

7. The closer to reality an experience is, the greater the benefit derived.
8. Incidental learning can be rewarding and is often an unexpected bonus of field trips. When the unexpected occurs, it is only prudent to give priority to safety.
9. The human resources available at a field trip site can contribute greatly to the success of a trip. It is worthwhile to cultivate a good rapport with these individuals.
10. Oral and written stories, fictional or nonfictional, contribute meaning to field trip experience in a manner particularly accessible to learners.

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